Diversity

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Diversity

A strategy to meet your need for skilled workers

Alberta
HUMAN RESOURCES AND EMPLOYMENT

the people & workplace department

Diversity

Diversity: A strategy to meet your need for skilled workers

This book is written for employers. It will help you address skilled labour shortages in an increasingly tight labour market. It presents:

- the business case for hiring a diverse workforce
- information about the particular strengths and abilities of specific groups
- strategies to recruit and manage a diverse workforce
- further information and resources.

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Contents

Workplace Changes and the Bottom Line 2

Building a Business Case for Diversity 4

Section 1—Aboriginal People 10

Section 2—Immigrants 15

Section 3—Older Workers 20

Section 4—Persons with Disabilities 24

Section 5—Visible Minorities 30

Section 6—Youth 34

Human Rights and the Employer 39

Resources 41

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Workplace Changes and the Bottom Line

Diversity: A strategy to meet your need for skilled workers is designed to help Alberta employers adjust to a changing labour force, and a changing workplace environment. These changes include:

- a growing economy that is expected to create over 166,000 new jobs in Alberta between 2001 and 2006
- an increasingly tight labour market in Alberta with global competition for talent
- an aging population and workforce, bringing both new opportunities and challenges
- the growing diversity of our society.

These changes mean that you may no longer be able to rely on the same pool of skilled workers—the "traditional workforce"—that you may have depended on in the past. In the period between 1940 and the 1970s "able-bodied males," for example, made up 80 per cent of the new entrants into the labour force. It is expected in the next decade that only 20 per cent of new entrants into the labour force will be from this traditional labour pool.

Where will you find the talent required for your next venture or expansion? Who will replace your current employees when they retire or move to other jobs?

Today's model of recruitment and workforce management can help you add to and increase the "human capital" of your company—whether your firm consists of five or 500 people. It's a model in which recruiting and retaining employees from a diverse labour market leads to better business performance. Companies can gain strength and balance by diversifying their workforce, just as individuals improve financial returns and security by diversifying their investments.

Employers can stay competitive by opening recruitment practices to find the best possible talent across the community. Since communities are increasingly diverse, you access the widest possible talent pool by seeking creative ways to reach out to groups that may be unemployed, under-employed or not in the labour force despite their skills.

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This diverse labour force includes men and women who are:

- Aboriginal people
- immigrants
- older workers
- persons with disabilities
- visible minorities
- youth.

Diversity: a strategy to meet your need for skilled workers makes a strong business case for recruiting from this diverse pool of talent and provides strategies that can help you in tapping its potential. It shows that striving to achieve a diverse workforce is not an end in itself but an action that can improve a company's performance in the provincial, national and global economies.

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Building a Business Case for Diversity

Greyhound Canada Transportation Corp.

'You learn from diverse groups. It's a two-way street'

Greyhound Canada Transportation Corp. says there's no question that it makes good business sense to hire within different groups, such as youth, persons with disabilities, immigrants and others.

One reason is that recruiting policies that support a diverse workforce have a positive impact on a company's image. But that's only one reason.

"You learn from diverse groups," says Pat Paras, Employment Equity Coordinator with the Alberta-based company. "That in turn allows us to understand our client bases and our community better. It's a two-way street. We're learning more, and they're gaining employment."

"The bottom line is—will it improve our bottom line? We strongly believe that it does."

Clearwater Welding & Fabricating Ltd., Fort McMurray

'Bring new staff in and see how they work'

The diverse workforce at Clearwater Welding & Fabricating Ltd. in Fort McMurray includes youth, Aboriginal people, older workers and persons with disabilities.

The main criteria for selection and retention are whether employees can do the job. The company employs, based on their projects, between 150 and 300 ironworkers, millwrights, boilermakers and others to construct structures and piping for the oilfield.

Young people are often hired as labourers, working their way up to become valued journeymen welders. The company's recruiting strategy is simple; they bring new staff in and see how they work. Hiring is done on an individual basis.

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Building a Business Case for Diversity

'Where will employers find the skilled workers to fill their new jobs?'

> Two national surveys released in 2001 by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business found that nearly half of all small and medium-sized businesses in Canada consider a shortage of qualified labour a serious problem. The highest rates of concern were found in Manitoba (59 per cent), Alberta (55 per cent) and Ontario (51 per cent).

How can you respond effectively to the changes in Alberta's workforce and gain a competitive advantage for your company?

First, be aware of what's changing. Simply put, Alberta employers are beginning to struggle to find enough skilled workers because the province's economy is growing so fast. Alberta has led Canada in economic growth for eight consecutive years. An additional factor is the gradual shrinkage of the traditional workforce—the pool of workers that employers normally recruit from—caused in part by the low birth rate after the baby boom of 1946-1964. The workforce is aging, and this trend is expected to accelerate over the next ten years as baby boomers approach retirement age. In 2001, the oldest baby boomers reached 55 years of age, and some may already be opting for early retirement.

> Alberta's economy will create an additional 166,421 new jobs from 2001 to 2006. This forecasted number presents employment demand by industry and occupation, and includes the number of people leaving the workforce due to retirement or death. (Alberta Modified Canadian Occupational Projection System forecast produced in December 2001 by Alberta Human Resources and Employment)

The makeup of the workforce is also changing, reflecting the dynamics of our society. It's rapidly becoming more diverse in culture, religion, ethnic origin and language.

- Aboriginal people make up the fastest-growing portion of Alberta's population, and therefore represent an important source for skills.
- Immigrants account for most of the growth in the labour force.
- Many older workers want to join, re-join or remain longer in the workforce.
- The workforce includes more persons with disabilities than ever before—and they have the skills to do jobs employers might never imagine them doing.
- Members of visible minorities represent a growing source of skilled and educated workers.
- Alberta youth are eager to find work and develop skills.

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The men and women who make up these groups all offer advantages to employers who hire and retain them. Some of these advantages are described in the following sections. Together, these groups make up a sizeable pool of skilled labour - one answer to growing workplace shortages.

Yet for all of that, the current distribution of these groups in the workforce does not reflect their population in our communities. They tend to have more trouble finding work than members of the traditional labour force.

> "Canada is a nation whose strength and success has historically come from its people. Today, as we increasingly become a knowledge-based economy, it will again be our people who will set us apart. Ensuring a society where all citizens feel valued and can contribute their full potential is key. It's up to us to ensure that the steps are taken within our organizations to provide an equitable workplace."
> *—John D. Wetmore, President and CEO, IBM Canada Ltd*

This book provides insight into the experiences of many companies, large and small, that have used diversity to their advantage. Owners and managers talk about what their company has done—and the results.

Consider the Potential

ABORIGINAL PEOPLE: Within a decade, one out of every five new entrants into the labour market will be Aboriginal, offering their knowledge and skills. Aboriginal people are eager to assume ever-greater roles in Alberta's economy.
See Section 1— Aboriginal people

IMMIGRANTS: A highly skilled workforce, immigrants bring new perspectives to companies. They help Alberta firms reach overseas markets.
See Section 2 — immigrants

OLDER WORKERS: They make up an increasing percentage of the population. Many older workers are now part of the baby boomer bulge. Their strength is their experience.
See Section 3 — older workers

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES: Representing one-sixth of all Canadians, persons with disabilities have an established track record of being reliable, productive and innovative workers
See Section 4 — persons with disabilities

VISIBLE MINORITIES: A source of skilled and educated workers, visible minorities are expected to make up about 20 per cent of Canadian adults by 2016. They bring a range of approaches, skills, ideas and perspectives to the workplace.
See Section 5 — visible minorities

YOUTH: Young people are keen to learn. At work, youth want to share their knowledge, energy and enthusiasm. Their skill levels are higher than ever before.
See Section 6 — youth

> "Diversity can help organizations: identify and capitalize on opportunities to improve products and services, attract, retain, motivate and utilize human resources effectively; improve the quality of decision-making at all organizational levels; and reap the many benefits from being perceived as a socially conscious and progressive organization. These benefits should be manifested in an improved bottom line and maximization of shareholder value."
> *—Dr. Jeffrey Gandz, Professor, Richard Ivey School of Business, The University of Western Ontario*

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The value of a diverse workforce

> **Diversity is related to global business success and the bottom line.**
> *—John F. Smith, Jr., CEO and President, General Motors Corporation*

Consider the following characteristics of a diverse workforce and see whether these traits can help your company.

IMPROVED PRODUCTIVITY: Members of a diverse workforce bring new ideas and perspectives to their jobs. Research and experiences outlined in this publication shows that diverse work groups tend to produce better solutions than homogenous teams.

ABILITY TO COMPETE GLOBALLY: Companies with a diverse workforce can better understand the issues of a diverse multicultural world and other ways of doing business in the global marketplace. Companies with a diverse workforce may also be more attractive to foreign investment.

FRESH IDEAS AND PERSPECTIVES: Members of a diverse workforce spark innovation and new approaches.

GREATER UNDERSTANDING OF CUSTOMER NEEDS: A diverse workforce helps companies expand their customer base because they understand, reach and serve diverse markets.

MEETING LEGAL OBLIGATIONS: Provincial and federal human rights acts prevent discrimination in employment. See Human Rights and the Employer section.

INCREASED ACCESS TO CONTRACTS: The federal *Employment Equity Act* requires federally regulated employers, including some contractors, to achieve a representative workforce in order to qualify for federal government contracts and business.

IMPROVED CORPORATE PROFILE: Hiring a diverse workforce can help improve your company's image. Being a good corporate citizen is increasingly seen as profitable. Many individuals participate in making ethical investments, and choose companies by their human resource practices, among other factors.

> **"As Canadian communities become increasingly diverse, organizations will have to continuously reassess the needs and interests of the community to ensure that the products produced and services provided are appropriate. Another challenge confronting organizations is ensuring the compositions of the workforce are reflective of the populations where the organizations are geographically located."**
> *—Cultural Diversity Institute at the University of Calgary (Diversity and Equity Programs in Corporate, Public and Non-Profit Organizations: Impact on Recruitment and Retention)*

Women in Your Workforce

Does your company really reflect the community where you do business? Is this diversity mirrored at all levels of your organization—or are there barriers to advancement of any groups?

For example, are women in your workforce represented at the higher levels of management, or in occupations such as the trades?

It's only common sense that the skills and expertise of all Albertans must be used as fully as possible to maximize growth potential.

Strategies for action

Develop your company's plans for recruiting and managing a diverse workforce by using these strategies where appropriate.

LEAD FROM THE TOP: A critical requirement in building and maintaining a diverse workforce is a clear statement by your company's leader, board of directors or executive committee about the importance of diversity in the organization. This direction should be linked to the overall business strategy, and become part of the human resource strategy. Assign an officer to be responsible for diversity management and improvement.

BUILD A BUSINESS CASE: Prepare a strong business case in favour of the need for diversity and the benefits of diversity initiatives. If appropriate, include marketing to a more diverse customer base. Use the strategies and resources in Sections 2-7 to overcome resistance to change by raising awareness about the benefits of a new direction.

> "A fair and just society values the diversity and potential of all its people. A smart society celebrates and promotes that diversity. And a prosperous society works to strengthen that diversity."
> *—Eric Newell, Chairman and CEO, Syncrude Canada Ltd., presentation to Public Policy Forum, Toronto, March 29, 2001*

EDUCATE YOUR STAFF: Build your company's commitment to diversity through internal education. That means taking care to ensure that your staff understands the value of diversity. One option is to arrange for someone knowledgeable to speak to staff about myths and misconceptions about members of the non-traditional labour force. Local agencies serving these groups may be able to provide trainers who can come to your workplace. Training should include how to deal with differences.

ENHANCE THE WORK ENVIRONMENT: Ensure that those making hiring decisions are familiar with the culture and needs of the individuals being considered. Strive to create an environment that fosters equality and fairness. Consider how people from other cultures are valued and made to feel part of your company.

EXPLORE BEST PRACTICES. Look into local business initiatives and find out how other companies recruited a more diversified workforce, and what results they achieved.

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REVIEW JOB DESCRIPTIONS: Attract persons from diverse groups by using job descriptions that describe the essential functions of the job. Ensure that applicants are not screened out as a result of inaccurate job descriptions. Where possible, use an "equivalent" combination of skills, experience and education.

CONSIDER THE BALANCE: Build a workforce that reflects the diversity of people in your community. Are there equivalent numbers of skilled men and women in all types of jobs, at all levels? Are the ages and backgrounds of your employees similar to those in your community?

GO WHERE THE ACTION IS: Be aware that your existing standard recruitment practices may not reach many members of diverse groups. Consider going beyond traditional advertisements and job board postings. Try reaching out to the diverse groups in your community through ethnic and cultural newsletters. Post your job notices with recruitment and training agencies serving any of the groups mentioned in the following sections. See Resources at the end of this book.

USE MENTORS: Consider opportunities to have workers act as mentors for members of your non-traditional workforce. They can help a new employee understand the culture of the workplace, provide guidance and act as a sounding board. Ultimately, they can help the employee achieve his or her full potential.

VALUE DIVERSITY: Ensure staff feel included and respected. Let them know they are an asset to your organization. Celebrate the qualities they bring into your workplace.

Tackling Systemic Discrimination

Systemic discrimination occurs when an existing practice or policy—or lack of a policy—results in the exclusion of a category of people. The result is that the individual is not treated the same, or cannot access the same opportunities as others. Many members of the non-traditional labour force are victims of systemic discrimination.

This discrimination may be unintentional. It may result from the application of seemingly neutral rules and conditions of employment that adversely affect certain groups. Examples of systemic barriers include:

- a requirement for a driver's licence when the real need is simply that the employee be able to travel from site to site
- a requirement to work full-time hours when the work could be handled by two part-time workers
- asking for a Grade 12 diploma when the skills can be learned by training on the job.

Employers can make a conscious effort to avoid systemic discrimination by reviewing their policies, practices and procedures.

Building a Business Case for Diversity

Aboriginal People

E-Can Oilfield Services Ltd., Elk Point

'Don't be afraid to try'

Working closely with Aboriginal people is a "definite asset" for E-Can Oilfield Services Ltd., says fleet manager Dennis Hopkins. Aboriginal people form at least 10 per cent of the firm's 400-person workforce. "They do a great job and are a definite asset to the company."

The firm has an excellent relationship with tribal councils in the area, which has been a great help in creating a more diverse workforce. The councils are familiar with E-Can's recruiting needs and help to screen applicants.

"Hiring a diverse workforce has strengthened the company because it grows from employees' experience in many fields," says Hopkins. "It makes our company really strong and diversified."

His advice to employers thinking about hiring a more diverse workforce? "Don't be afraid to try it out. Change can be a difficult thing, but we have found it has worked very well for us."

AEC Oil & Gas, Calgary

'Make sure Aboriginal people are on the bid list'

Barry Brisson, Aboriginal Affairs Coordinator for AEC Oil & Gas, estimates that up to 40 per cent of contractors on many of the firm's projects in the Cold Lake and High Level areas are Aboriginal. "We make a huge effort to recruit Aboriginal contractors," he says.

A commitment to Aboriginal involvement is part of the criteria the company uses to assess bids. The key, he says, is to "make sure Aboriginal people are on the bid list, and that they have the opportunity."

Hiring Aboriginal people through local employment strengthens the company by providing new ideas and enhancing its relationship with the communities where it operates. Field staff are fully engaged in the hiring process. AEC has provided ongoing cultural awareness training for employees; a strategy Brisson says has helped promote a more diverse workforce. The firm also intentionally seeks Aboriginal people for urban positions by attending Aboriginal job fairs and staying in close touch with Aboriginal employment centres.

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Section 1 — Aboriginal People

'One out of every five new entrants to the labour market'

Consider some significant trends. Can your company take advantage of them?

- The Aboriginal population is increasing twice as fast as the rest of Alberta's population.
- Alberta's Aboriginal population is younger than the province's population as a whole. Within a decade, Aboriginal workers will represent one out of every five new entrants into the labour market.

> "Our relationship with the local Aboriginal people can be traced back to long before the first barrel of oil was ever produced. Today we are proud to be the biggest industrial employer of Aboriginal people in Canada."
> *—Eric Newell, CEO and Chairman, Syncrude Canada*

- Educational and skill levels have increased among Alberta's Aboriginal people. According to the 1996 Canada Census, 43 per cent of Aboriginal people 15 years of age and older in Alberta had a post-secondary education compared with 38 per cent in 1991. This includes Aboriginal people who have completed, and not completed, a trade certificate, certificate, diploma and university degree.
- Aboriginal people have economic buying power due to population growth, economic development and settlement of land claims. They make up the fastest-growing market in Alberta and across Canada. Companies that hire Aboriginal men and women have an advantage in reaching and serving this market.

Aboriginal People in Profile

The Aboriginal population consists of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. These groupings encompass a number of different language, cultural, and political communities. In the 1996 Canadian census, Alberta's Aboriginal population totalled 155,645. Some 70,733 or 45% lived in Alberta's cities.

Forty-six per cent of Alberta's Aboriginal population is less than 20 years old, compared to 29% for the rest of the population.

The unemployment rate for Aboriginal people is more than 2.5 times higher than for non-Aboriginal people. This is due to a number of factors, including barriers and stereotypes that limit opportunities for Aboriginal people in the labour market.

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"Alberta's economy is changing rapidly, along with its employment and social structures. Aboriginal people have told us that they want to participate in all aspects of Alberta's vibrant economy."
—The Honourable Pearl Calahasen, Minister, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, in Strengthening Relationships, The Government of Alberta's Aboriginal Policy Framework.

Joint ventures and partnerships

Joint ventures or partnerships with Aboriginal businesses can give companies access to new markets. They can help companies cut costs and develop a stable, long-term workforce, particularly in remote communities.

Aboriginal companies are a dynamic presence in Alberta's economy, active in all business sectors. More than 600 Alberta firms owned by Aboriginal people are members of the Canadian Council of Aboriginal Business. The council's Alberta chapter alone has at least 73 corporate sponsors. There are over 20,000 Aboriginal businesses in Canada.

PCL has 25 partnerships with Aboriginal communities across North America. Partnerships are structured wherever possible as long-term relationships designed to maximize employment and business opportunities for the Aboriginal partner. PCL says that "these business partnerships have proved to be beneficial and successful for all concerned. Working together has resulted in employment and training opportunities, as well as financial and business independence for the people."
— From PCL website

"Using input from the Aboriginal community, our Oil Sands business set a goal in 1998 of raising full-time Aboriginal employment to about 12% of our workforce by 2002—which reflects the Aboriginal population in the region. Full-time Aboriginal employment is currently at ten per cent and growing, compared with three per cent in 1996."
—From Suncor website, 2001

More reasons to hire Aboriginal people

COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT: Under provincial and federal legislation, Aboriginal communities have considerable influence over environmental approvals for resource development projects. Aboriginal employment helps build community support for companies and their projects.

INCREASED ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS: Employing Aboriginal people helps companies improve their access to federal contracts or fulfill obligations if they are federally regulated.

ACCESSIBLE LABOUR FORCE: Many industry projects take place near Aboriginal communities. This proximity offers access to a potential workforce that resides within easy commuting distance.

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Strategies for action

Involve the community: Early in the recruitment process, involve both existing Aboriginal employees and Aboriginal communities in your company's business area. Invite community representatives to your workplace. Participate in local networks and events sponsored by Aboriginal communities and organizations to increase mutual knowledge and understanding and to raise awareness about job opportunities. Arrange to speak with young people and encourage them to enter and complete education programs so they can work for your company.

> Husky Oil Limited uses an employee-driven relationship management approach to make the link between Husky operations and the interests of neighbouring Aboriginal communities. An Aboriginal education program provides funding for secondary school upgrading and post-secondary education.
> *(Conference Board of Canada news release: Canadian Companies Recognized for Employment Equity, 1999)*

Find the skills you need: Establish relationships with schools that have Aboriginal students' associations or large Aboriginal populations. Many educational institutions offer specialized training programs for Aboriginal students.

Develop your workforce: Participate in co-op, summer placement, internship, job-oriented training, skill development or apprenticeship programs, as appropriate for your company. Link the training to job opportunities. Develop mentorship programs to provide guidance.

Resources for employers of Aboriginal people

See also Resources section at the end of this book.

Government

Aboriginal Human Resource Development Strategy: Provides human resource programming for Aboriginal people. Contact Human Resources Development Canada. Phone (780) 495-2082

***Aboriginal Workforce Participation Initiative* book:** An employer toolkit, including an Alberta regional supplement, helps employers become more knowledgeable about Aboriginal employment issues. Kit includes models, tools and resources. Contact Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (780) 495-7495.

Alberta Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development: Provides leadership in the development of strategies and policies to ensure that the well-being and self-reliance of Aboriginal people in Alberta will be comparable to that of other Albertans. Website contains A Guide to Aboriginal Organizations in Alberta: Website: www.aand.gov.ab.ca

Alberta Human Resources and Employment: Provides services and employment training programs to help Albertans prepare for and obtain employment. Some of these programs include support for employers. Website: www.gov.ab.ca/hre

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ALBERTA LEARNING: Provides apprenticeship programs and services to Aboriginal communities; provides assistance to the Alberta Aboriginal Apprenticeship Project, a joint initiative with Aboriginal communities and industry to increase participation in apprenticeship programs. Website: www.tradesecrets.org

HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT CANADA: Contracts with Aboriginal agencies to provide employment services to Aboriginal people. Website: www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca

INDIAN AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS CANADA: Works collaboratively with First Nations, Inuit and northerners, as well as with other federal departments and agencies, provinces and territories, to support First Nations and Inuit in developing healthy, sustainable communities and in achieving their economic and social aspirations. Website: www.inac.gc.ca

NORTHERN ALBERTA DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL: Advances northern development through regional initiatives in partnership with the private sector and community-based organizations. Website: www.gov.ab.ca/nadc

Agencies and organizations

ABORIGINAL MULTI-MEDIA SOCIETY OF ALBERTA: Provides listings of Aboriginal publications and helps employers communicate with Aboriginal people. Website: www.ammsa.com

ABORIGINAL EMPLOYMENT SERVICES: Information and resources are available throughout Alberta to provide employment and training services for Aboriginal people. Examples include Oteenow Employment and Training Society and Aboriginal Counselling and Employment 2000 Society. Employers can call the Career Information Hotline at 1-800-661-3753 for the office closest to you.

CANADIAN COUNCIL FOR ABORIGINAL BUSINESS: Connects Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and companies by building partnerships in employment, education and job training, and through networking and business development. Alberta Chapter phone (403) 237-0755, website: www.ccab-canada.com

FRIENDSHIP CENTRES IN YOUR COMMUNITY: Employment resources for the Aboriginal community. Check your telephone directory for the closest centres or contact the Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association. Website: www.albertafriendshipcentres.ca/index.htm

MÉTIS NATION OF ALBERTA ASSOCIATION: The representative organization for Alberta Métis with zone offices throughout the province. Database links employers and job seekers. Phone (780) 455-2200

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Delaronde Engineering Inc., Edmonton

'To me, the employers who don't hire immigrants—it's their loss'

When Karl Delaronde advertised for computer programmers for his Edmonton-based software company, one applicant turned up with a degree in mathematics from the University of Kiev—and significant challenges with English-language skills.

Delaronde decided the benefits of hiring that person were stronger than the risks—and he couldn't be happier with that decision. "The main issue was whether she could do a good job for us," he says. "She had the skills we needed, as well as a significantly better-than-average work ethic."

Delaronde was so impressed that he soon hired two other people from the Ukraine as programmers.

The bottom-line return on his investment, he says, "has been exceptional. We didn't have any loss in the learning curve, which is always a factor in the computer industry." He's so pleased about the results that he will continue to hire from immigrant groups whenever he can.

The need for English-language skills was secondary to the company's need for technical skills and knowledge. Over time, the immigrants' language skills have "improved markedly."

Initially, Delaronde said that he had to exercise "more careful management skills" to make sure that tasks were communicated clearly. "But clear communication is a requirement in all businesses."

"It's worth noting that they had tried and tried to find employment in their field and couldn't. To me, the employers who didn't hire them—it's their loss."

Weatherford Ampscot Ltd., Nisku

'Immigrants contribute a lot to the company'

Daryl Allen, controller for Weatherford Ampscot Ltd., has nothing but praise for the immigrants who form an important part of the firm's 105-member labour force at Nisku.

"They have certainly been good workers for us," he says. "They contribute a lot to the company."

The employees tend to be recent immigrants from India and Pakistan. Most work as machinists at the firm, which manufactures oilfield equipment for the international market.

There were some language barriers when the firm first started to hire among this group, Allen says, "but we've overcome that." That obstacle is dealt with by partnering new employees to other immigrants, and also by encouraging them to upgrade themselves in their trade.

Allen's advice to other employers who haven't yet tapped this pool of potential employees? "Take the plunge."

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Section 2 — Immigrants

'Discover untapped sources for potential employees'

The world has changed. The global movement of people is now as significant as the movement of goods and services. Today, 15 per cent of Albertans were born outside Canada. Immigrants are an important part of our society from an economic, social and demographic perspective. For example, the Canadian birth rate has fallen below the "replacement" level. Without immigration, the natural population growth in Canada would be less than half a percentage point a year.

As immigrants make up a significant portion of our society, it is no surprise that this demographic group holds a key to addressing the issue of skills shortages. Immigrants make up about 20 per cent of the Canadian workforce and, in fact, immigrants account for most of the growth in the labour force. Most immigrants who came to Alberta in 2000 were skilled workers, with expertise across a great range of occupations. As Alberta's population ages and members retire from the workforce, immigrants will be an increasingly important source for contributing vital skills and expertise.

Immigrants are a diverse group, with skills ranging from strong to limited command of English language ability, and understanding of Canadian workplaces. Many possess high levels of post-secondary education, while some possess a trade certification, diploma, or other informal education training.

> "Principal applicants (for immigration to Canada) within the economic class tend to be highly educated individuals in a number of knowledge-based professions, such as managerial workers, engineers, computer scientists and academics. Interestingly Canada gains four times as many university graduates from the rest of the world as it loses to the United States, while immigrants accounted for one-third of the growth in computer and computer-related jobs in the 1991-1996 period."
> *—TD Canada Trust Economics report (Canada's Talent Deficit, September 2001)*

Alberta's Immigrants in Profile

Immigrants are people born outside Canada who have chosen Canada as their permanent home for themselves and their families.

In 2000, Alberta welcomed 14,315 immigrants, an increase of 18.6% from the previous year. These immigrants settled in Calgary (59%), Edmonton (29%) and about 7.5% settled in rural areas. Most immigrants came from China, India, the Philippines, Pakistan and Korea. Immigrants also came from England, the United States, Yugoslavia, Ukraine, Afghanistan and Vietnam. More than half of all immigrants to Alberta in 2000 spoke English and were well educated. About 66.5% of all immigrants aged 15 years or older were intending to work.

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Immigrants bring a wide variety of backgrounds and innovative ideas that help to fuel the province's economic growth. With labour markets becoming increasingly tight, can your company afford to ignore them?

"There is a financial benefit to embracing diversity, and there's a cost—a cost when you don't embrace diversity," Gordon Feeney, Deputy Chairman of the Royal Bank Financial Group, told the Calgary Bridge Foundation for Youth annual banquet in March 2001.

Feeney pointed out that a commitment to diversity, including immigrants, helps the bank attract and retain staff: "There's a war for top talent, and a focus on diversity will help us discover untapped sources for potential employees. We simply can't afford not to know who they are, and what motivates them."

Alberta's immigration policy places a strong focus on attracting the brightest and the best of skilled workers. Since 1990, the proportion of skilled worker immigrants to Alberta increased from 34 per cent to 46 per cent in 2000.

Yet despite their skills, their education and their willingness to work, many immigrants in Alberta continue to face barriers to employment. Many have trouble making the transition into the labour market. Some are unable to realize their potential even after many years in Canada.

More reasons to hire immigrants

THE BOTTOM LINE: An ethnically diverse workforce can make a company more profitable, concludes a Conference Board of Canada study (Dimensions of Diversity in Canadian Business: Building a Business Case for Valuing Ethnocultural Diversity, 1995). The study says the key to entering international markets is gathering an "international employee base to serve as a natural bridge and help Canadian firms penetrate those emerging markets."

> **Sandra Wilking, special advisor to the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, says many mainstream Canadian business people are not pursuing opportunities in the Asia-Pacific region because of their concerns about differences in language, culture and business practices. She calls this a tremendous wasted opportunity.**

TRADE OPPORTUNITIES: Most immigration in recent years has come from countries where Alberta firms are working hard to increase trade. Employment of immigrants from these countries can give your company insight into the interests, cultures and business practices of the trading nations.

SKILLED AND EDUCATED WORKFORCE: Three-quarters of all immigrants to Alberta in 2000 were within a working age range of 15 to 64 years of age. Of these, more than half had a trade certificate, diploma, or a bachelor's, master's, or doctorate degree. Most skilled workers are engaged in professional or managerial occupations and skilled technical occupations.

FLEXIBLE SCHEDULING: Many employers find it challenging to offer expanded service as they increase hours to meet "24/7" demand. Immigrants from various faiths may be able to work weekends and some holidays so they can take other days off for their own religious and cultural celebrations.

Strategies for action

WIDEN YOUR SEARCH: Post job notices at cultural and community centres, grocery stores, immigrant serving agencies, places of worship and Alberta Human Resources and Employment service center offices. Recruit from English as a Second Language (ESL) programs offered at local colleges and other institutions. In smaller communities, contact the local Adult Community Learning Council to locate classes.

ACT LOCALLY: Work through local organizations that help recent immigrants integrate into Canadian society. Recruit from their employment programs, volunteer to speak at meetings or advertise in ethno-cultural newsletters.

BECOME AN EMPLOYER OF CHOICE: Recognize unique needs such as religious practices, language needs or requirements for mentoring and support. Provide opportunities for employees to share and celebrate their culture. Give all employees opportunities to learn about other cultures.

> "The rich diversity that makes Canada strong and competitive on the world stage is reflected in our people and processes. Changing workforce demographics, client composition and the globalization of business shape the way we work."
> *—From Ernst & Young's website*

Resources for employers of immigrants

See also Resources section at the end of this book.

Government

ALBERTA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: Economic sector profiles and other information for business. Provides business immigration programs. Website: www.alberta-canada.com

ALBERTA FINANCE: Profiles provide detailed demographic and socio-economic information for Alberta Provincial Electoral Divisions based on 1996 census data. Website: www.finance.gov.ab.ca/aboutalberta/ped_profiles/index.html

ALBERTA LEARNING: Supports settlement services for newly arrived immigrants, such as orientation, interpretation and translation, and information and referral services, as well as language assessment services. In addition, Alberta Learning supports literacy services, non-credit adult learning programs throughout the province, and apprenticeship and trade certification programs. For a list of immigrant serving agencies, call: Community Programs at (780) 427-5624 or fax (780) 422-1297. For the International Qualifications Assessment Services in Edmonton and Calgary, access website at: www.learning.gov.ab.ca/iqas/iqas.asp

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Municipal governments: Contact your local community services department for help locating local employment resources and organizations serving ethno-cultural and multicultural groups and immigrants.

Organizations and agencies

Agencies: Contact organizations that specialize in working with and advocating for immigrants, or agencies that work with a cross-section of immigrants to assist them in developing skills and accessing education and employment. See listings in the yellow pages of the telephone directory under Associations or Societies. Information is also available through Alberta Learning: www.learning.gov.ab.ca/other/

Colleges and universities: Offer programs and services such as English as a Second Language. Student employment or counselling offices can provide you with information and contacts. International students' associations or ethno-cultural clubs may be a good source of information. A list of post-secondary institutions is available on-line: www.alis.gov.ab.ca/edinfo

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Western Industrial Laboratories Ltd., Edmonton

'A tremendous experience pool'

Will Alexander sees older workers as "a tremendous pool of experience that probably isn't being tapped as much as it should be."

The general manager of Western Industrial Laboratories Ltd. of Edmonton, a small business, currently employs two older workers.

Alexander recalls an older worker who was first hired for general laboratory assistant duties, shipping/receiving and some fieldwork. He had a lot of "world experience," having lived and worked in Algeria and the Canadian north where he learned how projects are managed. "He was able to apply some of his organizational skills here."

The man worked for the firm for 10 years and then retired. Later, when the company was preparing to re-locate its labs, Alexander called the former employee and asked if he would like to manage the move. Moving a lab is a complex operation involving floor plans, measurement of available spaces, removal and set-up of benches and coordination with movers, plumbers, carpenters and electricians so there is little down time.

"He jumped at the chance, and we ended up with a move that was practically seamless."

City of Edmonton

'Start working to retain older employees'

Demographic consultant Richard Loreto of RAL Consulting Limited studied the City of Edmonton's workforce and concluded that the approaching retirement of many city workers threatens to strain services.

He found that one in four of the city's 6,000 full-time employees is over age 50. Three-quarters are over 40.

He encouraged the city to start working to retain older employees, in a proactive effort to avoid a serious staffing crunch in a decade as the baby boomers retire.

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Section 3 — Older Workers

'The qualities that employers need'

A TD Canada Trust economics report (Canada's Talent Deficit, 2001) predicts that Canada's economic growth could be hampered within a decade if the private sector is not prepared for the upcoming wave of retiring baby boomers.

The report urges companies to come up with more and unique ways of attracting older workers and retaining them in the labour market. It sees older workers as key resources for addressing current and future labour and skill shortages.

> "The projections show that, thanks to declining birth rates, growth in the population considered to be of working age will slow and then essentially cease. The average age of the workforce will rise, as will its average level of education. The proportion of female workers will grow. And people past the traditional retirement age will make up a larger and larger share of the pool from which employers draw."— C.D. Howe Institute (Aging Populations and the Workforce, Challenges for Employers, 2001).

A key strength of older workers is their experiences in life and at work. The advantage for employers is that these workers often come with a proven record of job performance, knowledge, skills, and work habits that can be relied upon. The data suggests, however, that some older workers experience difficulties in obtaining employment. While older workers are less likely to experience job loss than younger workers, they tend to remain unemployed for longer periods when they do lose their jobs. In 2000, the average duration of unemployment among Alberta workers aged 45 and over was almost 24 weeks, compared to an average of 13 weeks for the labour force as a whole.

Older Workers in Profile

Older workers are defined as those over 45, either in or out of the workforce. In 2001, there were more than 300,000 people over 45 in Alberta's labour force, representing about 18% of the total labour pool, up from 14% in 1991. The number of workers age 45 and older has increased to 33% from 25% in 1990.

The number of older workers relative to the population as a whole has been growing across Canada for the last 20 years and the proportion is expected to increase even further.

Educational and labour force data show that in 2000, almost 325,000 Albertans aged 45-64 had post-secondary education.

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More older workers are entering the workforce than ever before. An article in the Christian Science Monitor says not long ago older workers were considered technological dinosaurs in a dawning digital age, the seasoned professionals shuffled aside in the corporate downsizing of the early 1990s. Today, the article adds, 55-to-64-year olds are considered a virtual trophy in the workplace. Now, their experience is their strength.

More reasons to hire older workers

EDUCATION: Educational levels are rising among older workers. By 2005, workers entering the 55-to 64-year age group will have higher levels of education than workers of the same age today, according to a working group of the Forum on Labour Market Ministers. A larger proportion will be women. These workers will have less experience working for a single employer as full-time permanent employees but more experience adapting to technological change. They will also be more willing to participate in training and development activities.

JOB PERFORMANCE: Studies indicate there is no significant overall difference in the job performance of older and younger workers. The Forum on Labour Market Ministers working group found that the productivity of workers remains relatively consistent across different age groups.

LOW TURNOVER AND SCHEDULING FLEXIBILITY: Job turnover is low among older workers, which can contribute to team building and productivity, consistent product and service quality, and customer satisfaction according to a report, Aging Populations and the Workforce, Challenges for Employers, C.D. Howe Institute, 2001. Also, different age groups tend to have different demands on their time, which can work to the advantage of both employees and employers. For example, some older workers may prefer vacations in the spring, fall or winter and be willing to work during the summer when parents of young school-aged children usually prefer to take a vacation.

PERSONAL MOTIVATION: Each older worker will have his or her own reason for continuing employment. Traditional concepts of retirement are being questioned. Many older workers choose to remain employed because they want to continue to use their skills and expertise. Some work because they want to make a contribution; others work for financial reasons. Consider the fit between your organization and their needs.

"Many older workers, including some who have been out of the workforce for some time, are returning for computer training and to pick up other technological skills," says Mary Sheridan, Executive Director of Opportunity 45 Society in Calgary, a non-profit counselling and placement agency that links mature workers in transition and employers searching for competent and reliable staff. Sheridan believes there is a growing market for older workers.

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Strategies for action—older workers

> "Older people have a wealth of experience and ideas to contribute and their ability to make a valuable contribution continues as they age. When people retire, many are looking for new experiences and new working opportunities in a similar field, in a completely different field, on a volunteer, part-time or full-time paid basis. We also know that forecasts point to labour and skill shortages in a number of areas in Canada's and Alberta's economy. Older workers can continue to make important contributions to the workplace, particularly if flexible opportunities are available."
> *—Steering Committee for the Government-Wide Study on the Impact of the Aging Population (ALBERTA FOR ALL AGES: Directions for the Future, 2000)*

Study retirement alternatives and be flexible: Your company may wish to examine its policies on retirement. Can you afford to lose much-needed skills and expertise that may be difficult to replace in a tight labour market? Flexibility will be key to both attracting and retaining older workers. Alternatives include "phased-in" or "transitional" retirement arrangements for employees who would like to gradually reduce their hours of work, or change the demands of their job (for example, offer a new career track, or a transfer to another job).

Encourage mentoring relationships: Older workers can be an important part of succession planning in the workplace. Through mentoring opportunities, older workers can educate, train and advise younger protégés.

Lead by example: Ensure that workplace policies and practices help to create a corporate culture that values the contributions made by all workers, regardless of age.

> The costs associated with the turnover of one employee can run as high as 1.5 times the employee's annual salary. This includes separation costs, recruiting, training and loss of productivity during the transition according to a study by Merck & Company, Hewlett Packard, KPMG and Fortune magazine.

Resources for employers of older workers

See also Resources section at the end of this book.

Government

Alberta Seniors: Statistics on seniors, directory of organizations relating to older persons. Website: www.seniors.gov.ab.ca

Organizations and agencies

Agencies: Contact organizations that specialize in working with and advocating for older workers or agencies that work with a cross-section of older workers to assist them in developing skills and accessing education and employment. See listings in the yellow pages of the telephone directory under Associations or Societies.

Opportunity 45 Society: A non-profit, Calgary-based employment counselling and placement agency that links older workers in transition and employers. Phone (403) 221-0245

University of Alberta

'Look at the costs versus the benefits of hiring persons with disabilities'

Marion Vosahlo has seen the enrollment of students with disabilities increase significantly at the University of Alberta and says employers need to be more aware of the contributions these individuals can make to their organizations.

"We now see a broader population of students with disabilities enrolled, ranging from more visible disabilities related to mobility or vision loss to less apparent ones such as chronic pain, learning disabilities or mental health issues," says Vosahlo, director of Specialized Support and Disability Services at the U of A. "They have greater flexibility in setting their career goals because of better facilities, improved technologies, more awareness of their capabilities and needs and a more physically and academically supportive environment."

These same trends translate to the workplace, resulting in higher educational and skill levels among persons with disabilities seeking employment, she says.

Vosahlo gives the example of a deaf graduate she hired two years ago. He was the first U of A deaf student to graduate with an Honours BA with a major in drama. He has written, directed and acted in several successful plays at Edmonton's Fringe festival and other theatre productions.

"He has the language, writing and computer skills needed for jobs such as developing a career database and various technical responsibilities and it has worked out really well. He adds a lot to our office environment and accommodation costs for him have been low. Communication is not a barrier."

Her advice to employers? "Look at the costs versus the benefits of hiring persons with disabilities. The costs are usually low and the benefits are tremendous: a great commitment to the job and new perspectives for the workplace that can really help an employer."

Tim Horton's, Grande Prairie

'People are losing a lot of good hires out there'

Two years ago, Serge Allard, owner/operator of three Tim Horton's outlets in Grande Prairie, decided to hire a person with a developmental disability.

The employee won a bonus for excellent work and attendance. "This staff member is very reliable," says Allard. Allard is so pleased that he now has hired more persons with developmental disabilities. Various agencies in Grande Prairie have been an enormous help in making the initiative work, he says. Hirings are on a trial period for two or three months, and start with an agency representative meeting with the employer to tell him about the prospective employee. Allard then sits down with both the prospective employee and the agency counsellor to discuss the tasks that will be required.

The agency supplies a "coach" who works alongside the employee for up to a month. This is a great help because restaurant staff do not have the time during busy periods to provide extra training.

Care needs to be taken to ensure that the individual fits into the workplace and the workplace is welcoming for the individual, the same as for any employee.

Allard says he decided to hire among persons with developmental disabilities to "give back to the community," but has found that it makes sense from a business perspective.

"People are losing a lot of good hires out there. I always say: 'I'll hire you, and you show me what you can do.'"

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Section 4 — Persons with Disabilities

'One-sixth of all Canadians'

Persons with disabilities—representing one-sixth of all Canadians—have an established track record as productive and innovative employees.

They offer skills and expertise often overlooked or under-utilized in the past. New technologies and increased access to post-secondary education means that persons with disabilities are capable of doing all kinds of work that many employers would never imagine them doing. In its report, Equal to the Task II, DuPont reported that "employees with disabilities are equivalent to DuPont's other employees in job performance, attendance and safety."

Alberta men and women with disabilities want to work. The Federal Task Force on Disability Issues concluded in the 1996 The Will to Act report that work "is among the top concerns of Canadians with disabilities."

Nonetheless, persons with disabilities often encounter barriers to mainstream employment, largely because employers and job candidates with disabilities have not been connecting. People with disabilities report that the biggest single barrier they experience is not the disability itself but attitudes and misconceptions about their skills and ability to add value in a workplace setting.

Persons with Disabilities in Profile

The most recent Health and Activity Limitations Survey (HALS) found nearly 244,000 working age Albertans (15-64 years) with disabilities. Of these, 58% were employed, compared to more than 78% of the same age group in the non-disabled population.

An analysis by the Royal Bank Financial Group in 2000 said that in 10 years, the number of working-age Canadians with some form of disability will increase by 1.4 million. The disability rate is even higher among Aboriginal people. A 1991 Statistics Canada survey found that 31% of Aboriginal adults reported some form of disability.

The HALS Survey itemizes the following types of disabilities: hearing, seeing, speaking, agility, mobility, mental/learning, and unknown physical disabilities (reported physical limitation but no reported difficulty performing specific tasks).

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The rewards of hiring persons with developmental disabilities are "tremendous" says Gus Pieters, owner of Peter's Drive-In, a well-known fast food restaurant in Calgary. He says staff turnover is low among the persons with developmental disabilities that he hires and they do their jobs well.

More reasons to hire persons with disabilities

MARKETING OPPORTUNITIES: Persons with disabilities are a major consumer group. Forward-thinking companies are re-tooling their business plans to reach this market. A 2000 analysis by the Royal Bank estimated that persons with disabilities have spending power of about $25 billion in Canada. Individuals with disabilities on your staff can help you reach this market and increase your competitive advantage.

People with disabilities and seniors, two increasingly overlapping groups will, taken together, "represent between 20 to 25 per cent of the recreation, retail, entertainment, workplace and housing marketplaces in the next 10 years and beyond."
—Article in Construction Canada (2001) by architect Pamela Cluff.

PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS: Many persons with disabilities have considerable experience solving problems and meeting challenges based on their disabilities on a regular basis. Creative problem-solving skills can help companies find new solutions and lead to more satisfied customers.

REQUIRED EDUCATION AND SKILL LEVELS: Access to education and training programs and the use of new technologies enables people with disabilities to gain the skills and expertise to compete and work effectively in a wide variety of occupations.

HIGHER STAFF RETENTION RATES: The retention rate of employees with disabilities was 22 per cent higher than their non-disabled counterparts according to Pizza Hut in the U.S. The company also found that because many of its customers have a family member with a disability, the act of employing disabled workers improved sales, customer loyalty and community image.

USE EQUIPMENT TO ENHANCE ABILITY: Advances in technology make it possible for people with disabilities to work competitively (for example voice activated computers).

The majority of disabilities are mild. Persons with mild disabilities have a very high participation rate in the labour force. Persons with severe disabilities are least likely to be in the labour force. Even so, 26 per cent of this group do participate.
—Health and Activity Limitation Survey, Statistics Canada (1991)

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Strategies for action

Use community resources: Partner with agencies and community organizations to help identify appropriate job candidates. Participate in job fairs. Form relationships with local agencies that help employ persons with disabilities. Use on-line resources such as job banks and databases of pre-screened candidates available through non-profit agencies.

Target your postings: Send job postings to local disability-related agencies.

Strengthen the job interview: Always put the person first, before the disability, and avoid questions that are not job-related. In the job interview, do not ask specific questions about the applicant's disability, unless he or she introduces the topic. Don't assume. Give the applicant the opportunity to explain how he or she will perform the essential functions of the job.

> "Instead of focusing on the disability and what the employee can't do, employers need to focus on the ability of the person and what he can do. Then discuss with the individual what accommodations would be necessary."
> *—Lisa Bendall, Managing Editor, Abilities magazine*

Create an effective work environment: Ensure a new employee with a disability is included in workplace activities and training, and has opportunities to integrate with the team. Involve existing co-workers, and consider a buddy system or mentor. Discuss with the new employee the merits of holding an awareness session for co-workers, respecting the person's right to confidentiality.

Improve employee productivity: Regularly discuss accommodations that can be made to work processes, tools and technology. Types of accommodations like flexible work schedules, organizing workspace for easier movement, or improved lighting improve working conditions and productivity for all staff.

Inside the Workplace

Creating an accessible and efficient workplace is good for customers, staff and business. Many changes that were originally made for persons with disabilities benefit everyone. Examples include automatic doors, curb cuts, upgraded computers with better keyboards and software, ergonomic furniture and flexible work schedules.

The goal is to make changes to rules, standards, policies, workplace cultures and physical environments to ensure that they don't have a negative effect on an individual because of the person's mental or physical disability, gender, or any other protected ground. See Human Rights and the Employer section in this book.

Although government funding for workplace supports to assist persons with disabilities is available in some instances, many employers find that the costs of these changes are low and choose not to seek funding. Most supports cost less than $500 and can be easily introduced. The HALS Survey reports that fewer than 20 per cent of persons with disabilities require supports beyond those provided to other employees.

Resources for employers of persons with disabilities

See also Resources section at the end of this book.

Government

ALBERTA HUMAN RESOURCES AND EMPLOYMENT (AHRE): General information on employment standards, workplace health and safety, mediation services and other workplace information. Website: www.gov.ab.ca/hre

DISABILITY RELATED EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS: This AHRE program assists persons with disabilities in overcoming barriers to employment. Assistance is offered in four areas: workplace supports, financial supports, educational supports and assistive technology. Call the Career Information Hotline at 1-800-661-3753 for the Alberta Human Resources and Employment service center nearest you.

The department also offers the *Employment Series for Persons with Disabilities: Tips for Employers* book with a more complete listing of resources and additional information about recruiting and managing persons with disabilities and related issues. Order a copy at: www.alis.gov.ab.ca/careershop

Publication available on-line at: http://ab.workink.com

DISABILITY WEBLINKS: Single-point access to programs and services offered by the federal, provincial and territorial governments for persons with disabilities. Website: http://www.disabilityweblinks.ca/

FEDERAL ACTIVITIES: A listing of programs, services and funding sources offered by the Government of Canada can be found in *Bridging the Gap: Government of Canada Programs and Services of Interest to Canadians with Disabilities.* Available at: www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/bcph-odi/documents/bridge_gap/index.shtml or by phoning 1-800-665-9017

BARRIER-FREE EMPLOYEES: A practical guide to help employers provide workplace supports for persons with disabilities. Available from the Canadian Human Rights Commission at: www.chrc-ccdp.ca/ee/bfe-eso.asp

OFFICE OF DISABILITY ISSUES: Human Resources Development Canada provides sections for "Job Seekers with Disabilities" and for "Employers of Persons with Disabilities." www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/bcph-odi

OPPORTUNITIES FUND: The federal Opportunities Fund aims to help persons with disabilities that are not eligible for Employment Insurance. General information and information for sponsors is available from your local Canada-Alberta Service Centre, or at: www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/bcph-odi

Organizations and agencies:

CANADIAN ABILITIES FOUNDATION: Includes a directory of Canadian and international diversity links and diversity organizations. Website: www.enablelink.org

CANADIAN COUNCIL ON REHABILITATION AND WORK: Provides information on workplace supports to employers, job seekers and service providers. Website: www.ccrw.org

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Colleges and universities: These local institutions offer programs and services for persons with disabilities. Student employment or counselling offices can provide you with information and contacts. Most institutions have a disability resource centre. List of colleges and universities:
www.learning.gov.ab.ca/college/postsecsystem/postsecinst/postsecinst.asp

Organizations that specialize in working with and advocating for a specific disability group, disease or condition can provide useful information. Or contact agencies that work with a cross-section of persons with disabilities to assist them in developing skills and accessing education and employment. See listings in the yellow pages of the telephone directory under Associations or Societies.

WORKink Alberta: Dedicated to the employment of persons with disabilities. Provides services for employers, job seekers, entrepreneurs and professionals. Employment vacancies can be posted on this site: http://ab.workink.com

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Capital Health

'We hire on the basis of people's abilities'

As Canada's largest integrated academic health region, Capital Health provides complete health services to 860,000 people in the Edmonton area and provides specialized services to 1.6 million people across central and northern Alberta. With more than 17,000 employees, the Capital Health workforce is a reflection of the varied patient population it serves.

"Capital Health is very fortunate to have such a diverse workforce," notes John McPhail, Vice President of Human Resources. "We hire on the basis of people's abilities. A person's suitability for a job is determined by their skills and experience, and not any other factor. As a result of our hiring practices, we have visible minorities employed as physicians, nurses, administrators, technologists, housekeeping staff and just about every other position we hire for."

McPhail explains that it may be helpful to patients – many of whom are members of visible minorities – to be cared for by a workforce that reflects the diversity of the community. For example, the Northeast Community Health Centre serves a population where up to one-quarter of the residents have "mother tongues" other than English. Capital Health uses multicultural health brokers, who have expertise in working within many different cultures, to facilitate communication between community members and health centre staff.

Bank of Montreal

Business plan targets visible minorities

A task force at the Bank of Montreal recommended improving the diversity of the workforce, while identifying barriers to upward mobility experienced by minority groups. As a result, the bank's new business plan includes a commitment to give visible minorities high profile/role modeling positions and opportunities.

The task force also tracked the hiring, retention, training and promoting behaviours of all supervisors. The bank approached Canadian colleges and universities for guidance in assessing and recognizing diplomas, degrees and work experience gained outside Canada. It also displayed its commitment to diversity by giving all employees a copy of their diversity initiative report.

As a result of the initiative, representation of visible minorities in the bank's workforce increased to 14 per cent, including 6.8 per cent at senior levels.

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Section 5 — Visible Minorities

'20 per cent of all Canadian adults by 2016'

The federal Employment Equity Act defines "visible minority" as someone, other than an Aboriginal person, who is non-white in colour/race, regardless of place of birth. For this publication, the term "visible minority" is used to refer to people who face barriers to employment because of their race or colour.

The statistics show that the visible minority population is growing faster than the total population. Can your company benefit from this trend?

The evidence shows that employers who tap into this significant labour pool can help their company with a wider range of approaches, skills and ideas. The Conference Board of Canada says in Dimensions of Diversity in Canadian Business that competing to win in the global economy "will require an ability to attract, retain, motivate and develop high-potential employees from a variety of ethno-cultural backgrounds." Statistics Canada's Visible Minorities: A Diverse Group report in 1995 states that "despite educational diversity among the various groups, visible minorities are generally more highly educated than other adults."

Despite these and other advantages, visible minorities as a whole have higher unemployment rates than other adults. This trend is found across educational levels. For example, many members of visible minorities with a university education face employment barriers not encountered by others with the same education.

The reason? The Canadian Council on Social Development says in Unequal Access: A Canadian Profile of Racial Differences in Education, Employment and Income that while overt racism appears to be declining, a "subtle" form of discrimination is replacing it.

> **"Discrimination ... is defined by the application of ostensibly neutral rules and conditions of employment that adversely affect certain groups because of their culture and appearance."**
> ***—Cultural Diversity Institute at the University of Calgary***

Visible Minorities in Profile

Under the 1996 Census, Alberta had 269,000 persons or about ten percent of the population identified as members of a visible minority. The visible minority population in Calgary and Edmonton is about 25%. The numbers include recent immigrants as well as Canadians whose families have been here for many generations.

Are there any barriers to recruitment or advancement of visible minorities—or any other group—at your workplace?

More reasons to hire visible minorities

NEW IDEAS: "The presence of visible minorities in the workplace helps companies by introducing new ideas and processes and improving the way business is done," according to Sammy Watson of the National Conference of Visible Minorities in the Federal Public Service.

> "We value the strength of diversity in our workplace and we value the contribution all our employees bring to our business."
> *—Telus Corporate Responsibility Report*

NEW MARKETS: Many individuals among visible minorities can offer insight into the cultures and business practices of other countries, providing employers with an advantage in developing new markets.

Strategies for action

BUILD CHANGE WITHIN: Work to ensure that a multicultural perspective is reflected in the mission statement, employment practices and public image of your company.

REACH OUT: Understand that recruiting visible minorities takes strategies that are different from the standard employment agency/classified ad approach. Advertise in media that serve visible minorities. Advertise and recruit in colleges, universities and schools. Ensure that your company's recruiting and advertising materials reflect diversity.

RECOGNIZE THE VALUE: Consider the benefit of job qualifications such as speaking a second language and experience with other cultures.

> "The Westin Calgary values and thrives on diversity. As a company that has the privilege of hosting customers from around the globe, the Westin Calgary relies on the inventiveness and dexterity of its employees in exceeding customer expectations. Drawing from various cultures, backgrounds and experiences, staff can respond immediately to any type of request."
> *—From 2001 Diversity Award Citation given by the Calgary Immigrant Aid Society*

SMOOTH THE CAREER PATH: Visible minorities may get overlooked when promotions are made. Research shows that a mentoring or "buddy" system can be mutually beneficial and help the employee reach his or her full potential.

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Resources for employers of visible minorities

See also Resources section at the end of this book.

Governments

Municipal governments: Contact your local community services department for help locating local employment resources and organizations serving ethno-cultural and multicultural groups.

Organizations and agencies

Agencies: Contact organizations that specialize in working with or advocating for visible minorities. See listings in the yellow pages of the telephone directory under Associations or Societies. Information is available through Alberta Learning at: www.learning.gov.ab.ca/other

Colleges and universities: Student employment or counselling offices can provide you with information and contacts. Contact the International Students Association or student clubs. Lists of colleges and universities at: www.learning.gov.ab.ca/

Diversity Calgary: Tools, strategies and information to help organizations that wish to eliminate systemic barriers to participation.
Website: www.gov.calgary.ab.ca/community/diversity/index.html

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BioWare Corp., Edmonton

'They're motivated to work hard'

Employees under 25 make up 39 per cent of the 121-person workforce at BioWare Corp., an award-winning Edmonton company that produces electronic entertainment for home consoles and personal computers. The firm, one of the largest independent computer game developers in North America, hires youth for highly skilled jobs in computer programming, digital animation, quality assurance and computer system administration.

BioWare's commitment to youth earned it the Employer of Youth Award of Distinction in 2002. The award, sponsored by Alberta Human Resources and Employment, is presented annually to the Alberta firm that has shown the greatest leadership in integrating youth into its work environment.

"We look for people who are well educated, highly skilled, enthusiastic and passionate about what they do," says Dr. Ray Muzyka, Joint CEO of BioWare. "We've been fortunate to find people that have these skills, that also happen to be young." Hiring skilled youth has many advantages for a company such as BioWare. "It's very important to us that our staff understand the audience they are working to please. By being young, and interested in the industry, they are much more in tune with our customers," says Dr. Muzyka.

Dr. Greg Zeschuk, Joint CEO, says youth are "motivated to work hard in this industry, and that makes them appealing to us as members of our development teams."
Dr. Zeschuk's advice to companies considering hiring youth for high-tech positions? "Do it! Develop strong relationships with educational institutions where your particular industry is taught. Sponsor student activities at those schools, attend career fairs, make your company visible in the student marketplace, and they'll come to you."

Legacy Woodcrafts, Calgary

'I take people who have the right frame of mind and I train them myself'

Three years ago when John Muellers hired a 19-year-old to work in his office furniture manufacturing firm, the new employee knew little about cabinetry.

"Now he's my top assembler," says Muellers, whose family firm was established in 1964 and employs 10. Muellers also hired another youth, at age 19 who had never before been given a chance to prove himself. He performed well operating simple machinery for the first six months. Now he's the second-top assembler at Legacy, doing custom work.

Hiring youth isn't just an act of altruism for Muellers; it also makes business sense. "I'm training our skilled people, because they aren't out there otherwise," he says. "With many people going into technology, we're losing our skilled labourers. I take people who have the right frame of mind and I train them myself."

Youths may be inexperienced when they start, but after he trains them for six months Muellers says their work and attitude often surpass those of vastly more experienced employees. The reward, he says, is strong employee commitment: "All of them are there, working late for me when I need them, because when they need me I'm there for them."

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Section 6 — Youth

'New perspectives and a wider range of ideas'

Employers across Alberta constantly work to keep their companies thriving. Where can they find the workers to help them achieve their goals?

One answer is among the pool of job-seekers aged 16 to 24—Alberta's younger workers. They are eager to find jobs. They tend to be flexible and adaptable to change, imaginative and full of fresh ideas, entrepreneurial, motivated, independent, and willing to experiment. They tend to know computers and are eager to learn new technologies.

> "Alberta's ongoing prosperity and quality of life depend on the development of our young people and their ability to share their skills, knowledge, energy and enthusiasm."
> —*The Alberta Youth Employment Strategy, June 1999.*

Yet even in Alberta's robust economy, youth unemployment remains high, more than double that of Albertans aged 25 and older. Even well qualified young people with strong academic credentials often have difficulty finding the opportunities that will help them manage the transition between education and employment.

> "Generation Y (born between 1976 and 1995) will bring remarkable technical skills, a strong entrepreneurial outlook, a deep-seated social consciousness and, like every new generation, a healthy dose of questioning and change," says Julie Wallace, manager of workplace trends and forecasting at the Society for Human Resource Management, says in HR Magazine, April 2001.

Alberta's Youth in Profile

On average, 284,900 youth were employed in Alberta in 2001, compared with 240,200 in 1991. This represented 16.7% of Alberta's labour force. These labour force numbers from Statistics Canada reflect the age category 15-24, while this publication, and most government programs, use the age group 16-24 to define youth.

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More reasons to hire youth

MOBILITY: Younger workers are often willing to re-locate to their employer's community or for work assignments. Most have drivers' licenses and many have their own vehicles.

SKILL LEVELS: The skill levels of Alberta's youth are higher than ever before. In 2001, 61 per cent of youth between 20-24 years of age have some learning beyond high school. This learning includes achieving post-secondary certificates, diplomas or degrees, or learning the required skills in the trades by participating in Alberta's Apprenticeship and Industry Training program.

NEW APPROACH: Younger workers can provide new perspectives and a wider range of ideas, such as useful information on marketing to young customers.

Training Youth

Investing in training for youth can boost a company's profits. "It doesn't make sense to ignore the skills of your workforce while you're investing lots of money in hard assets," says Jim Courtney, co-owner of Courtney Berg Industries Ltd., of Linden, Alberta, manufacturer/exporter of custom truck boxes.

Lee's Sheet Metal of Grande Prairie invests in youth because the company knows it pays off. "We're in business, like any business, to be profitable," says company manager Dale Sheridan. "We hire youth because it is profitable for us in the long run. Young people are very trainable."

One option for employers is participation in a co-operative education program. Students alternate semesters of academic study with periods of employment in a job related to their program. This is a cost-effective way for managers to hire motivated, career-oriented people with the necessary skills. Another option is through Alberta Learning's Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP) designed for high school students. This program gives high school students a chance to start learning a trade as part of their regular diploma program and gain work experience at the same time.

RAP enables employers of tradespeople to develop their own skilled employees and to pass down skills and knowledge from their more experienced workforce. CAREERS -The Next Generation adds value to the RAP program by working with local schools to pre-screen students and match them with employers in their community.

Other possibilities include hiring outright, hiring a youth for a summer job or to fill in for an employee on a temporary leave of absence. If the replacement employee is a good fit for your company, you may consider a permanent position.

Strategies for action

RECOGNIZE PARALLELS. Many students develop valuable skill sets through school projects or community involvement. They may also develop portfolios of their work. Know how to evaluate your job requirements so you can match students' skills to the needs of your company.

DEVELOP A TRAINING PLAN: Determine what kind of orientation and training young people will need to fit into your company and how you will provide that training.

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For the last three years, Sepps' Fine Foods in Innisfail has undertaken a special initiative to hire and train youth. Heather Klein, technical manager, said their young workers are "valuable employees—and you can't ask for anything more—someone who is always at work, hardly ever misses a day, develops good work ethics and learns to be a strong team player."

DEMONSTRATE, EVALUATE AND DISCUSS: When training, be sure to explain why something is done in a certain way. Demonstrate how it is done, rather than telling the new employee how to do it. Allow for supervised on-the-job training. After the training is completed, evaluate the employee's skills in a non-threatening way. Praise the employee for work well done and discuss any areas that may require further training.

How to Grow your Business

Are employers missing a great opportunity by not fully tapping into the youth labour market? Are they willing to look beyond a relative lack of job experience and give younger workers a chance to prove themselves? Are they overlooking a great opportunity to grow their businesses and remain competitive in the 21st century?

Organizations such as the Alberta Building Trades Council and Merit Contractors Association would answer "yes" to all three questions.

"The construction industry has a real need for young people to get involved," says Mark McCullough, executive director of the Building Trades Council. The council represents 32,000 affiliated union members in the Alberta construction industry.

Alberta faces a big labour shortage as today's baby boomers retire, he says. He likens the situation facing Alberta employers to that of a hockey coach. If the team is winning, he says, a coach may not be inclined to bring in new, younger players. "But even the Wayne Gretzkys retire. If you haven't brought along new talent to replace them, you end up with a team that one year is a Stanley Cup winner, and then a couple of years later is at the bottom of the division."

McCullough sums it up by saying that organizations that are not focused on hiring and training replacements "aren't thinking of the long-term goals and future of their company."

The Merit Contractors Association sees the need to hire young workers in the same light.

"Youth may only make up 25 per cent of the population, but they make up 100 per cent of the future," Merit says in its newsletter. "That's why the Merit Contractors Association is working hard to develop programs that will attract young people to careers in the construction industry."

Why is the construction industry serious about getting youth interested in its industry? Unionized and non-unionized construction and construction trades employ about 140,000 among Alberta's 1.6-million workforce. With the construction industry growing and a large number of skilled tradespeople nearing retirement age, the need for new construction workers in Alberta is greater than ever.

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Resources for employers of youth

See also Resources section at the end of this book.

Government

ALBERTA HUMAN RESOURCES AND EMPLOYMENT: AHRE funds Youth Connections offices across Alberta. See Organizations and Agencies for information.

ALBERTA LEARNING: Contact Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training offices to inquire about training youth in apprenticeship programs, including RAP. Call the Career Information Hotline at 1-800-661-3753 for the office closest to you. Website: www.tradesecrets.org

Organizations and Agencies

CAMPUS EMPLOYMENT OFFICES, CAREER OFFICES AND CO-OPERATIVE EDUCATION/INTERNSHIP PROGRAMS: These services are offered by most universities, colleges, technical institutes, vocational schools and other post-secondary institutions in Alberta. Contact the post-secondary institutions in your community for information on specific programs.

CAREER EDGE: A national private-sector internship program designed to provide career-related experience for young people. Contact Career Edge, 155 University Avenue, Suite 1650, Toronto, ON M5H 3B7. Phone (416) 363-0003, toll-free 1-888-507-EDGE. Website: www.careeredge.org

CAREERS – THE NEXT GENERATION: Services target high school students and include the Registered Apprenticeship Program and TECH PREP, where students gain experience and knowledge in trades, technologies and other occupations. Contact: CAREERS - The Next Generation. Phone (780) 426-3414 in Edmonton, 1-888-757-7172 across Alberta. Website: www.nextgen.org

HIGH SCHOOL GUIDANCE COUNSELLORS OR CTS (CAREER AND TECHNOLOGY STUDIES) TEACHERS. Contact your local high school for information about career fairs for youth and school-to-work programs.

YOUTH CONNECTIONS: There are 37 Youth Connections sites across Alberta funded by Alberta Human Resources and Employment—and the number of sites is growing. Your business can recruit youth through Youth Connections job boards. Training options include work experience, mentoring, job shadowing opportunities and others. Call the Career Information Hotline at 1-800-661-3753 for the office closest to you. Visit: www.gov.ab.ca/hre/youthconnections

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Human Rights and the Employer

Federal, provincial and municipal legislation spell out the rights and responsibilities of employers and employees in Alberta. Alberta's *Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act* is one of these laws. It safeguards the equality rights of Albertans by prohibiting discrimination and harassment on protected grounds and in certain areas of activity such as employment. Most businesses in Alberta fall under the jurisdiction of this act.

The *Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act* protects people from harassment and discrimination in employment on the following grounds: race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, physical disability, mental disability, age, ancestry, place of origin, marital status, source of income, family status and sexual orientation. Discrimination should not occur in any stage of employment.

Recruitment

Hiring and recruitment practices should be free from bias. Advertised job descriptions should clearly state bona fide job requirements and use gender-neutral wording. Employers are not allowed to ask any questions that contravene human rights legislation. For example, questions about an applicant's medical history, ethnic background, marital or family status or gender are not permitted. Tests for dexterity, medical exams for physical ability, or stress-handling tests must be job-related. Drug testing is not permitted. Applicants should be advised that, once hired, they might be required to pass such tests or exams.

Employment

Workplaces should be free of harassment. Employers, managers, supervisors and employees should understand what type of behaviours constitute harassment, and should not practise it or allow it, under any circumstances.

Workplace practices, policies and procedures should treat people equitably. An employer has a legal duty to take reasonable steps, in policies or conditions of work, to accommodate an employee's individual needs, if they relate to the grounds protected under the Act. For example, an employee may be unable to work on a particular day because it conflicts with the religious beliefs of the employee. In such cases, the employer must try to resolve the conflict in a way that is agreeable to both parties. However, if the only way to resolve the conflict would cause the employer undue hardship, the legal duty does not apply.

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Termination or severance

An employee cannot be terminated if the reason for termination relates to any of the grounds protected under the legislation. For example, an employer cannot terminate a woman because she is pregnant. Unsatisfactory employee performance, undue hardship caused by a medical or other condition, or other factors may be cause for termination.

Find Out More

The Human Rights and Citizenship Commission provides educational sessions and materials to assist employers to prevent discrimination. For a more in-depth discussion of the topics introduced above, or to find out more about educational presentations and available resources, consult the Commission's website at www.albertahumanrights.ab.ca or contact one of the Commission's offices listed in the Resources section.

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Resources

Group-specific resources are listed in the sections for Aboriginal persons, immigrants, older workers, persons with disabilities, visible minorities and youth. In addition, the following information may be useful.

Government

Alberta Human Resources and Employment: Information on careers and the labour market, Alberta's employment standards, workplace health and safety, mediation services, facilitation and other workplace information.

Call the Career Information Hotline at 1-800-661-3753 for the AHRE service centre nearest you.

Further information about programs and services is available at: www.gov.ab.ca/hre

Alberta Learning Information Service (ALIS): The Internet gateway to career, learning and employment information in Alberta. Includes labour market bulletins and news, provincial growth trends and statistics. Website: www.alis.gov.ab.ca

Canada-Alberta Job Order Bank Services (JOBS): Helps connect employers and job seekers by displaying job vacancies. Website: www.alis.gov.ab.ca/employment/jp

Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission: Advice, information, educational resources and programs to prevent or resolve complaints of discrimination related to employment and other areas. Northern Regional Office, Edmonton (780) 427-7661. Southern Regional Office, Calgary (403) 297-6571. Call the toll free RITE line from outside Calgary or Edmonton 310-0000. Website: www.albertahumanrights.ab.ca

Alberta Finance: Provides detailed demographic and socio-economic information for Alberta Provincial Electoral Divisions based on 1996 census data. Website: www.finance.gov.ab.ca/aboutalberta/ped_profiles/index.html

Alberta Economic Development: Economic sector profiles and other information for business. Website: www.alberta-canada.com

Municipal governments: Contact your local community services department for help locating local employment resources and community organizations.

Human Resources Development Canada: Provides Alberta labour market information and external links to websites of interest to employers, job seekers and entrepreneurs. Website: www.ab.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/lmi

Human Resources Management: An on-line one-stop information source designed to help small- to medium-sized employers in meeting their human resource related needs and developing their business management skills. Website: http://employers.gc.ca

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Organizations and agencies

Contact organizations that specialize in working with and advocating for Aboriginal persons, immigrants, older workers, persons with disabilities, visible minorities and youth. Or contact agencies that work with one or more of these groups to assist them in developing skills and accessing education and employment. See listings in the yellow pages of the telephone directory under Associations or Societies.

CALGARY NETWORK FOR EQUITY AND DIVERSITY: An association of local professionals who meet to share information and promote diversity in Calgary businesses. Phone (403) 271-2907

COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES: Post-secondary schools offer programs and services to many labour force groups. Student employment or counselling offices offer information and contacts. International students' associations or ethno-cultural clubs may provide contacts and information.
www.learning.gov.ab.ca/college/postsecsystem/postsecinst/postsecinst.asp

CULTURAL DIVERSITY INSTITUTE: Provides information on cultural diversity and its organizational impact, provides diversity training and educational programs, and conducts issue-based, applied and collaborative research. Phone (403) 220-4689
Website: www.ucalgary.ca/cdi

DIVERSITY CALGARY: Tools, strategies and information to help organizations that wish to eliminate systemic barriers to participation. Website:
www.gov.calgary.ab.ca/community/diversity/index.html

DIVERSITY AND EQUITY NETWORK OF NORTHERN ALBERTA (DENNA): Networks of organizations interested in dealing more effectively with diverse workforces. Provides information and education and networking opportunities. Phone (780) 436-5609

LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY OR CHAMBER OF COMMERCE: Provides general employment resources for employers. See your local phone book for contact information.

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We'd like to hear from you ...

Diversity: A strategy to meet your need for skilled workers

Date

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Fax: 780-422-5319

We'd like to hear from you

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